

6 November 1970

1. The A-1 is the most eminently suitable USAF weapons system for support of irregular forces in the Laos unconventional war. It possess the four primary characteristics mandatory for guerrilla close support:

- a. A sizeable ordnance load.
- b. Delivery accuracy for placement of weaponry in close proximity to friendly forces.
- c. Sufficient maneuverability to keep a man-sized target in sight.
- d. Long range and required endurance to remain over friendly positions for a considerable time. In addition, the aircraft contains communications equipment for contact on UHF, VHF, and FM with ground forces. It carries the broadest mix of ordnance items of any current aircraft. There is no substitute for the A-1 in the U.S. inventory, and no weapons system anywhere that has engendered so much confidence in its effectiveness within the irregular force.

2. Until June of 1968, U.S. jets had provided negligible support to the Lao forces. The A-1 was responsible for protection and assault

support both day and night in north Laos. Outside of the T-28 RLA F squadrons, essentially no support was rendered to guerrillas in south Laos. Historically, it can be said that the A-1's carried the air war in Laos until mid-1968.

3. In early 1968, when Site 36 was attacked, the enemy had penetrated the outer perimeter. Weather had been sour for three days, and at the time there was less than ^a 1000-foot ceiling and limited visibility. Somehow, without radio aids, two A-1's descended through the clouds into the valley between the ridges and peaks, and made the difference in repelling the assault. The courage and skill of the pilots is a standing testimony to the Fireflies, Hoboes, Zorros, Sandies, and Spads who have served through the years.

4. Subsequent to mid-1968, a breakthrough was scored in procuring U.S. air support. Peaks of several hundred sorties a day were common as irregular operations bit harder and deeper into the enemy. The A-1 was still the backbone of the force. Until gunships appeared on the scene, the A-1 was the only effective night support weapon. Literally hundreds of times, A-1's working in marginal weather in mountainous terrain, laid their ordnance in proximity to the perimeter wire and broke NVA/PL attacks on friendly outposts and sites. During bad weather periods in daylight, A-1's have appeared in conditions thought

impossible for flying and provided the support that made the difference between holding and defeat for the guerrillas. Without exception, when U.S. helicopters are used for infiltration of irregulars into high threat operating sectors, A-1's have provided the necessary firepower for flak suppression, HLZ preparation, and strikes on the enemy, making possible project incursions behind enemy lines. It has not been cheap. Many American fighter pilots have died, been wounded, or are missing while supporting the Lao guerrilla.

5. Now that U.S. forces are being drawn down in accordance with the President's policy, the A-1's are reducing their sorties to a lower and lower level. They still provide the backbone of irregular close support by U.S. air. Coming along behind the Spads is the Royal Lao Air Force which is approaching 3000 sorties per month in T-28's. There is already a solid tradition of skill and dedication within the T-28 force which is in the image of the departed A-1's. It is clear that the Spads have been responsible for buying us the time to Asianize the air war in Laos, at least in part, and we can't help but miss the most effective weapons system in this theatre for air support of a guerrilla war.

6. In sum, the performance of the A-1 over the years has been a skilled and courageous one covering the irregulars 24 hours a day under good and bad weather conditions. Although an alleged VFR system,

it is the closest thing to an all weather day/night aircraft in the Indochina war. Judging by its performance the conclusion is that the aircrews were and are fighter pilots in the grand tradition.

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